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HELTER SKELTER: The Ultimate Prosecution 40 Years Later

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Vincent Bugliosi – Keynote Speech on the Prosecution of Charles Manson

- There have been many serial killers in American history, so why the public's fascination with Charles Manson and his prosecution?
 - Manson held radical views about the future and his role in it as a prophet. Once blacks rose up and eliminated the white race, Manson and his followers would emerge from hiding and Manson would be looked to as a leader of the people, since blacks were, in his views, inferior and incapable of leadership.
 - Manson garnered a small but incredibly devoted following of young people who hailed him as a prophet and would follow his every command.
- Manner of work and preparation during the trial
 - Many late nights were spent preparing during the trial—it was the only way to stay on top of everything.
 - Hours and hours spent going over the case, preparing closing arguments.
 - Physically traveled to sites from the case to visualize how things occurred, the environment, etc. to better understand the mind of Manson and his followers.
- Dealing with the media
 - Generally no need to work with the media. The only time where Bugliosi became involved with the media was during the O.J. Simpson to counteract media leniency with Simpson—the entire media assumed he was innocent.
- Interactions with Manson during the trial
 - Bugliosi and Manson endured well-known staring matches that would last for many minutes during the trial. Manson wanted to intimidate Bugliosi just as he had with his countless victims and followers.
- Trial skills learned from the experience
 - The ability to look at things without the veil of assumptions and dogma is vital to understanding the defense perspective. Apply pure logic, even if it takes lots of time and effort. Get involved with everyone in the trial process.

- Taking notes throughout every step of the trial process—both in and out of the courtroom.
- Put yourself in the defense's shoes and think of their arguments before they make them, especially in the closing. There should be no need to be furiously taking notes for your rebuttal during the defense's closing.
- Be deferential to your audience and the team—treating them as equals will create a strong team.
- Don't write your closing at 4 a.m. the night before the actual closing—it should be one of the first things you create, and then work backwards from there.